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Choosing Good Day Care

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Ministry of
Community and
Social Services



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Ministry of
Community and
Social Services

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Questions ... Questions ...

If you are considering out-of-home care for your child or children, you'll likely have plenty of questions.

- What does private-home care offer?
- What about a nursery school or day care centre?
- How about combining two types of care, such as mornings at a private home and afternoons at a nursery school? And so on ...

This booklet has many of the answers — plus pointers on how to get the specific information you need.

Whatever your choice, it must be remembered that the preschool years are vital growth years. Children's development, both physical and emotional, will be influenced by out-of-home experiences and the quality of care. Your choice must be beneficial for your children.

Day Care — What is it?

Day care is regular child care outside your home provided by someone else while you are working.

It is illegal to "leave any child (under the age of 16) without making reasonable provision in the circumstances for the supervision, care or safety of the child."

There is usually a charge for day care but some families receive financial help. See page 13 for details.

Day care offers many benefits. Often, the people who provide day care are trained professionals and can provide activities designed to help children learn while playing. Also your child will have the opportunity to meet others the same age.

One important point: A day nursery cannot accept a sick child. Alternative or emergency arrangements must be made for those times when your child has a cold or other illness.

There are several convenient ways of having your child or children looked after. This booklet describes the three main kinds of day care.

Private-home day care

A private home is generally a home in your neighborhood, or convenient to your place of employment, where the children of one or more families are cared for during the day. Often the day care provider is a mother with children of her own at home.

In a private home, your children are part of a family atmosphere. They play with other children and often experience such outings as trips to the supermarket or park.

This type of day care, according to provincial regulations, can accommodate up to five children *only*, ensuring your child ample opportunity to relate to the day care provider. (Some municipalities restrict this to three youngsters.)

Good private-home day care should provide more than a babysitting service. Activities should include alternate quiet and active periods, and be flexible so that your child has a well-rounded schedule.

Although private homes are not licensed, as are nursery schools and day care centres, they may in some areas be supervised'. Supervised homes are those approved by the municipality or a community agency. They meet specific requirements such as safety standards and adequate play area. Parents of children in a supervised private home may apply for financial assistance toward the cost of day care. For further information see page (13) .

Nursery schools

Nursery schools provide half-day programs which means they are not set up to meet the needs of most working parents. But you may wish to arrange a combination of private-home care and nursery school for your child.

Day care centres

Day care centres provide full-day programs and serve a noon meal.

In all other aspects, nursery schools and day care centres are the same — we refer to them collectively as day nurseries.

All day nurseries are licensed under *The Day Nurseries Act* of Ontario to provide day care for more than five children. They are required to meet basic standards for health and safety regulations, food, security and provide a setting for warm human interaction. They must also provide approved activities to stimulate your child's mental, physical and social development.

The supervisory staff members of a day nursery are required to have child guidance training. As soon as there are more than four children on the premises, there must be two adults.

Some day nurseries provide care for children from infant-age up. Some offer half day, some full day care, and some provide after-school care for children up to the age of ten.

In a day nursery your child will be introduced to group activities as well as organized daily schedules. Most day nurseries divide the children into groups of no more than 25.

Private-home or day nursery?

In making your choice between day nursery or private-home day care, it is important to consider your child's developmental stage. If he or she is more than two years of age, you may prefer to combine a private home with a day nursery on a half-day basis. Other considerations are convenience and the general availability of day care in your community.

How do I locate day care?

Phone your municipal office (most phone books list government numbers in the blue pages at the back of the directory), or the closest office of the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Check with agencies such as your community information centre, the YM-YWCA or YM-YWHA, with ethnic organizations, churches or other service organizations in your community.

Phone your doctor or the local public health office.

Check local newspaper advertisements, or bulletin boards in laundromats and supermarkets, and yellow pages under Day Nurseries.

How do I select the best day care for my child?

After you've located several possible day care facilities, use your telephone to narrow the search.

Here are some questions you may wish to ask on the phone.

The location? Is it convenient? What about public transit? Is there a waiting list? How much are the fees and how are they paid? At what age are children accepted? What are the hours of daily operation? Does the centre close on all holidays?

It's a good idea to give the day care provider your child's birth date on the phone to be sure there's space in the appropriate age group or class.

Next step: A visit

After you have chosen one or more facilities which seem to be suited to your needs, you should visit them. Be sure to visit during the day, when they are in operation. Take your child so you can see how the day care provider reacts to your child and how your child reacts to the new setting.

Private-home day care — First visit

What should I ask the day care provider?

How does the day care provider feel about parents who work?

A person who believes that a mother should stay home to look after her own children may not make a good day care provider.

What is the provider's philosophy on child care?

You will be happier if the day care provider and yourself share similar ideas about such items as cleanliness, play and discipline. It could confuse your child to have one set of standards applied during the day and another on evenings and weekends.

Does the provider have training, experience?

Many private-home day care providers have taken child development courses and may have a certificate in a child-care related field. Some have their own children and life-skills as a parent.

What arrangements are there for safety?

There are special dangers in the kitchen, bedroom and bathroom. For example, medicines and cleaning materials must be locked out of reach. A child should not be able to lock him or herself into the bathroom. The day care provider should be able to unlock the door from outside. Every lock should be out of children's reach.

What type of activities does the provider plan?

In general, variety and flexibility are signs of a good private-home day care program:

- Does the day care provider give each child sufficient personal attention? A story, some cuddling or small-talk is needed by a child each day.
- Do the children play among themselves? It is important for your child's development that he or she learn to get along with other children.

- Can the children choose activities from a variety of supplies? Are messy activities such as painting, glueing, paper-cutting and water play also provided? Your child should experience variety and creativity in his or her daily activities.
- Is there a good range of quiet and active activities each day? It is necessary for children to have quiet periods to unwind as well as active periods to use up energy.
- How much television do the children watch? What types of programs? You'll feel happier if you and the day care provider agree on television viewing.
- Are there toys for infants? They need not be expensive commercial toys — homemade nesting cans of different sizes and soft toys can help keep an infant happy.
- Are there outdoor play facilities? Is there a yard or nearby park, perhaps with a swing, sand box or climbing area? Will your child have some out-of-doors play during each day?

What should I tell the day care provider about my child?

- Whether he or she sleeps in the afternoon.
- The age and stage of development such as teething and toilet-training.
- The attention span — long or short?
- Any special problems such as allergies to food or animals.
- Whether he or she has had day care before.

When making your decision...

Consider which day care provider best suits your needs and will provide the most suitable day care and surroundings for your child. Take into account all the aspects listed, with some emphasis on how your child and day care provider responded to each other during the visit.

If possible, check with other parents whose children have been placed in the home.

How can I establish a good working relationship?

Once you have made your selection, review with the day care provider what you expect from day care. For example, if you want your child to come home in a clean set of clothes, tell the day care provider. Perhaps your child could have a set of clothes to change into for play during the day. (See clothing page 12)

Put your agreements in writing.

Remember

The fee: When is it paid and in what form (cheque or cash)? What other services does it cover (snacks, taking your child to the doctor)? Do you agree about charges for absences caused by illness or vacation? Is there an additional charge for late pick-up?

Pick-up: Arrange pick-up and delivery times. How much notice does the day care provider require if there is to be a late pick-up? Who is to pick up your child? What will be done when someone new is sent to pick up your child?

Insurance: Does the day care provider have insurance that would cover mishaps to your child?

Daily activities: Agree on arrangements for meals, rest time, indoor and outdoor play.

Emergency care: Use a form. Supply the day care provider with the necessary information about your doctor and how to reach you or friends or relatives during the day.

Health: Supply general health information about your child — allergies, previous illnesses (such as measles, chicken pox), immunization shots for scarlet fever, tetanus, etc.

Back-up person: Who would replace the day care provider in the event of an emergency?

Notice of Leaving: Make sure that you both agree about how much notice is required for withdrawing your child.

Work together: Discuss with the day care provider such things as foods your child doesn't like, fears and toilet-training. Talk over your child's day — discuss any problems. Report any change in behavior you may notice. It is vital for your child's well-being that there be a good exchange of information between a parent and a day care provider.

Day nurseries — First visit

What should I look for when I visit?

Once you have selected those day nurseries you wish to consider, arrange a visit. The morning is a good time. When you visit check the following:

The day-to-day program and type of activities:

Nature: Children caring for plants, feeding animals or spending time in the park are enjoying happy and healthy learning experiences.

Creative materials: Children painting with bright, thick colors, or oozing and shaping clay are expressing personal feelings, which will help develop their desire to read and write. Gluing small boxes, or scrap pieces of wood together and painting their sculptures, will help teach shape, balance and space (up, down, right and left).

Dramatic Play: Boys and girls both trying out roles, new experiences, and many varied types of activities are fulfilling their need to express their imagination. Do you see children with blocks, boards, rideable cars such as ambulances or fire trucks, play money, costumes, dolls and toy animals, musical instruments?

Use of senses: Smelling, hearing, tasting and touching a wide variety of substances stimulates curiosity and learning.

Quiet Play: Looking at a book or listening to a story or music on a record player can be happy and personal experiences for children.

Do you feel that there is a wide variety of learning activities in the day nursery?

Equipment does not have to be complicated, glossy or expensive to create a happy learning atmosphere. Actually, commercial learning kits and games, expensive toys, coloring books or dittoed sheets may limit a child's imagination and learning.

Look at the children. Do you see...

- Children absorbed and happy in their play?
- Children turning to their teachers for comfort, help or information?
- Children exploring with materials and equipment?

A good program means no waiting for an activity to start, and an easy transition for the child from one activity to another.

Listen to the teachers

- Do they look directly at the children and use the same tone of voice with children as with adults? Children need to be treated with respect to gain self confidence.
- Do they respond to what a child has said? Each child needs to feel important within the group.
- What kinds of comments do the teachers make about a child's work? Children should be able to create in their own way, express their own feelings and the teacher should show appreciation for each child's efforts.

Observe the playground

You should see all of the following activities:

- Climbing, balancing and swinging. These help children's development and confidence.
- Riding tricycles and throwing balls. These encourage children to learn new skills.
- Dramatic play with boards, blocks and tires. These are activities which provide creative expression and social learning.
- Water and sand play. These are rich sensory experiences providing a valuable learning opportunity.

Teachers must ensure safety and provide loving and personal care to the children. Children need help when hurt, when feeling sad or isolated from play with a group of children. How are social relationships developed and supported? The quality of play and relationships depends on the active planning and attention of the teachers.

What should I discuss with the teacher?

The Program

Does the day nursery have a good program organized for the children? There should be allowance made for extra outdoor play on nice days. How much television are the children permitted to watch? TV should not replace other activities. Schedules should include frequent field trips suited to the children's needs. For example, children living in cities may visit a nearby farm to see the animals.

Does the program make provision for the integration of one or two handicapped children? Having a handicapped child in a normal setting is a good experience for both the normal and the handicapped child.

Discipline

What is the philosophy of the teacher regarding discipline? How is an aggressive child helped? What method of discipline is used when necessary? The philosophy of the day nursery regarding discipline should be acceptable to you.

Security

Do the staff members work well together? This helps the children feel comfortable. Check with the teachers who will be working with your child and try to find out how they feel about daycare work. Are they happy at this day nursery and planning to stay for quite awhile?

Parents' program

Do you, the parent, have a 'say' in decisions made for your child? Do you feel welcome at the day nursery? Close relations between the home and day nursery are beneficial to your child's development. Any situation that arises should be worked out in a cooperative manner with you. Are parent visits and conferences included in the day nursery's program?

Meals and snacks

Ask to visit the kitchen and to look at the menus that are posted. The hot noon meal should be one that will appeal to children and should provide good nutrition. It should be well-balanced with meat, fish or eggs and vegetables and a raw vegetable as well. Do the children have regular snacks? What are they?

What policies should I check?

Ask to see the current license under *The Day Nurseries Act* of Ontario. When there are conditions on the license or the renewal you should feel free to question the administrator.

You will need to know the day nursery's policies about the following;

Fees: When are they to be paid — weekly, monthly, and in what form?

Terms of payment: Are there policies regarding days your child is sick, absent or on holidays?

Pick-up and delivery times: What is the policy about late pick-up?

The parent program: Are there group meetings and regular interviews regarding your child's progress? Is there time for informal chats? Do they have a policy about your telephoning?

Transportation: If you are arranging with the day nursery for transportation, discuss the cost and length of the trip — more than half an hour is not desirable. Do they have a minimum age requirement for transportation service?

Withdrawal: How much notice do they require?

How can I prepare my child for day care?

Introduce your child to day care gradually. For example, you might stay the whole time on the first day and then a little less the next day, and less on subsequent days until your child is comfortable.

Give your child a chance to get used to the situation. Your child may want to watch before joining in and you must be prepared for any special or extreme behavior your child might show. For example, some children not used to day care may be petrified in the totally new and frightening environment. It is difficult for a parent to witness such fear; it is also difficult for a busy teacher to handle. It is important for you and the teacher to work together to help your child overcome any extreme fears.

Most children find it difficult to be away from their parents at first and will cry. You can expect some resistance in the early days or weeks. After a trial period of several weeks, however, your child may continue to show considerable discontent.

Signs of discontent could be loss of appetite or refusal to eat, fear of going to sleep, thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, crying when you arrive at the day care door each morning, etc. If these things persist you may have to make a change.

But remember that moving your child many times also causes problems, so be absolutely sure that the move is essential. Avoid moving your child every few months or weeks, because this also causes difficulties.

Clothing

You should provide clothing appropriate for the types of activities. Jeans (or other long pants) and T-shirts, for example, are ideal for all types of active games while long dresses make running, climbing and jumping difficult. Shoes or slippers should have rubber soles.

Clothes that your child can handle are best. For example, pull-on jeans are easier than those with zippers and snaps; slip-on shoes are easier than those with buckles and laces.

In winter your child should have adequate clothing for outdoor play — a snowsuit, warm boots (with heavy socks), warm mittens, a hat that covers ears, and a scarf. A one-piece snowsuit with zipper is usually easier for a child to get into than a two-piece with buttons.

Discuss any special clothing requirements with the day care provider. For example, a special trip to a farm may require old clothes, rubber boots, etc. If the clothes your child is wearing become soiled, it is often required that you leave a change of clothing at the home or nursery.

All your child's clothes and footwear should be marked for easy identification — child's name inside shoes and boots, for example.

Can I get financial assistance?

You may be eligible for a financial subsidy towards the cost of your day care.

How much you receive will depend on:

- Your total earnings.
- Your total allowable expenses.
- The number of children you have who require day care, their ages and the amount of day care each requires.

What are the requirements?

Your child must be receiving day care in:

- A licensed day nursery that has an agreement with the municipality, Indian band, or Government of Ontario.
- A 'supervised' private home. Supervised private homes are those approved by the municipality or a community agency. They must have no more than five children for day care, meet standards of health and safety, and provide assurance of continuing service for your children. They receive professional help in the understanding of child development.

Not all private homes are supervised, and not all municipalities provide supervision. If you are planning to apply for a subsidy — check with your municipality to see if private homes in your area are supervised before placing your child in one. If there are no supervised homes in your area, then you should place your child in a licensed day nursery.

If supervised private-home day care is not yet a service in your community, inquiries about beginning a service should be directed to your local municipality.

There is no minimum age for children whose parents receive a subsidy. The maximum is nine years.

Where do I get more information?

The Community Information Centres, of which there are nearly 60 in Ontario, also keep complete and up-to-date files on day care services available in the communities they serve.

Phone or write to the social services department of your municipality, or contact the nearest office of the Ministry of Community and Social Services

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